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ABSTRACT

High stakes testing is associated with controversy and dialogue in this era of calls for accountability on the part of educators, and the controversy has been strengthened by the national testing plans included in the Leave No Child Behind Act (Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 2001). A look at the literature on high stakes testing and some of the legal positions that have been taken shows that the high stakes testing movement involves reductionism, mechanism, and reversion to the basics in measuring student achievement. Well-intended attempts to assess student achievement have often led to overemphasis on minutiae or basics rather than the understanding of larger issues and more complex questions. It is possible that the United States should explore the two-ladder system of education in Europe in which students can choose a vocational education track, with the possibility of entering the college track at a later date. This would provide opportunities for gainful employment at an early age and motivate youth not ready for a college bound route. (Contains 10 references.) (SLD)

AERA 2002 Hi Stakes Testing Polarization or Accountability

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Historical Perspective

In 1911 Frederick W. Taylor's *Scientific Management* including subdivisions of *Shop Management*, *the Principles of Scientific Management* and *Testimony Before the Special House Committee* was a guideline for increasing labor productivity and profit. Taylor worked to break down a worker's task into ever smaller parts so they could be uniform, easily measured and carried out. Taylor believed workers are inherently lazy and he suggested time and motion studies to maximize productivity.

An educational measurement philosophy was espoused by Edward L. Thorndike in the early 1930s. His philosophy was that everything that exists, exists in some quantity that can and should be measured. Over the years changes and refinements in assessment and measurement have penetrated every level of the educational system.

Callahan (1962) in his *Cult of Efficiency* described how school administrators and teachers were influenced by efficiency experts at the turn of the century. During the period, schools were often run like factories with machine-like efficiency, measuring teacher's output of units of information imparted. It was a period of micromanagement of every aspect of the teaching-learning process.

John Dewey (1930) wrote in "America-by-Formula" that quantification, mechanization and standardization are the marks of America. He continued by noting that our life is quick, excitable, indiscriminating, lacking in individuality and in direction by the intellectual life.

The marks and signs of this "impersonalization" of the human soul are
Quantification of life, with its attendant disregard of quality, its
Mechanization and the almost universal habit of esteeming technique
as an end, not as a means, so that organic and intellectual life is also
"rationalized;" and finally, standardization..our pronounced trait is
mass suggestibility (Dewey, *America-By-Forumula*: 25.)

The American first response to complex problems tends to be a search for and implementation of a cheap, quick, technological fix. After implementation of such a fix, committees, workshops, and symposium are held to find band aids for unforeseen negative multiplier effects of the action. Single interest groups' rapid response political action teams use litigation and the media to get their particular cause, interest, concern or

agenda disseminated to influence decision makers. Monitoring the media to ensure accuracy and quality of information disseminated was a concern of John Dewey. Educational success and failure is often dealt with in terms of media hype. In *Problems of Men* Dewey noted that events are often taken out of context and sensationalized.

The catastrophic, namely, crime, accident, family rows, personal clashes and conflicts, are the most obvious form of breaches of continuity; they supply the element of shock which is the strictest meaning of sensation; they are the new par excellence, even though only the date of the newspaper could inform us whether they happened last year or this, so completed are they isolated from connections (347.)

Hi-Stakes Testing has led to controversy and dialogue as pros and cons are proclaimed.

Character education, civic responsibility, making a contribution to society, civility, comity are concepts not easily measured by standardized instruments, but are vital for civility in communities and society. Excessive emphasis on testing and measurement leads to a competitive educational system that may fail to take into account wide divergences of school facilities, social class, transportation access, parental involvement and neighborhood environment.

It would be interesting to view our present from 100 years in the future. One might see in a 21st century school setting in the United States, diverse school populations with a variety of nationalities represented in classrooms. English-as-a-second language students and minorities would predominate in some areas of the country as majority-minority populations change the demographics to a multicultural, multiracial society.

One might see a severely polarized scene with an array of parental lawsuits reflecting conflicting values, and goals. Some want more discipline; others want less discipline; critics demand accountability, politicians push legislation for standardized testing to demonstrate student achievement, and education at all levels is an arena for litigation in a litigious society. There is one constant, however. Parents call for rigor, improved school achievement results but when their children fail a test or complain about being overworked parents seek exemptions from performance based assessment criteria.

Curricular revisionism is also part of the current educational scene. From the future, one would note the elevation of third-world philosophies, reference to oppressed

minorities including women, a focus on disenfranchised marginalized people, and multiculturalism often taking the form of a protest movement against European values, history, and culture. This protest movement may be seen in articles, textbooks, educational decision making, accreditation bodies' guidelines, also in newly minted doctoral candidates philosophy and often reflected in a commitment to unidimensional points of view. As the United States becomes a multiracial society with majority-minority populations in over 50 percent of America's largest cities, educators will need to commit themselves to pluralism in theory and practice.

Hi Stakes Testing

President George W. Bush signed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, (Leave No Child Behind Act) passed by a bipartisan Congressional vote in 2001 and into law in January 2002. The legislation set in place a call for statewide reading and mathematics tests to be given each year in grades 3-8. Olson (2002). The Robelen (2002) noted that the bill also required within twelve years a highly qualified teacher in every classroom and demonstrable progress by states and districts toward academic performance for all their students within twelve years.

After extensive debate, litigation, and negotiation, a committee set a high bar for states planning to use a mixture of state and local tests, or of criterion-referenced and norm-referenced tests, to measure student performance against state standards. Olson (2002) noted that the "No Child Left Behind" Act of 2001 required a formal process for standards and assessment that continues to draw fire from various groups for different causes. Four groups are suing the Educational Department to have the committee's membership include a balance between educators, parents and students. Olson also reported that some legislators felt states would have too much flexibility in putting assessment systems together; others were concerned about a patchwork of state and local assessments; still others were concerned with requirements for testing all students including homeless, those with disabilities and with English limited proficiency. The panel agreed that special-needs pupils must be assessed at the grade level and other special testing provisions were required for students with profound disabilities (Olson, 2002). Olson (2002) discussed a report by a federally financed assessment committee, "Using the National Assessment of Educational Progress to Confirm State Test Results,"

designed to determine how to display gaps and gains among the various states in the required reading and mathematics sample tests of 4th and 8th graders. The National Assessment of Educational Progress, a federally financed assessment made up of testing experts, is continuing to examine how to develop a comparison of educational achievement among the states. Provisions are made for active participation by teachers, parents and other interested parties. Single interest groups are giving input to the test experts covering such subjects as oversampling, appropriateness of all background questions, and efforts to ensure that all NAEP questions are “secular, neutral and non-ideological.” When asked what those words mean, Diane Ravitch, a board member and research professor at New York University responded “We don’t know! It’s not as if NAEP questions have been loaded with ideological or political imagery until now, but those are the kind of words that can cause a lot of problems.” Olson continues by noting that Puerto Rico is Spanish which may require tests developed with Spanish versions of math and reading.

The theory of standardized testing to measure student achievement has often unforeseen multiplier effects that may be detrimental to a broader view of student learning, of what is ultimately worth knowing. First, one would need to examine who is responsible for designing, and implementing standardized tests. Second, who determines the content of the standardized tests should be thoroughly investigated and test users should be acquainted with test makers. Third, consider how the test scores will be utilized to measure achievement, to provide accountability.

Consumerism, tokenism and benchmarking are imports from the corporate sector. The pressure on teachers, administrators and staff to teach to the test has led to excessive test preparation throughout the school year. Broader learning takes a secondary role when test scores are used to measure schools’ achievements against each other. Keller (2000) noted that students are unmotivated and often don’t care whether they pass the test or not. Since schools are graded on student outcomes on standardized tests, educators have provided a variety of material inducements including fast-food meals, donuts, pizza parties, savings bonds, candy bars, money, college scholarships, academic honors, cars, lap top computers, sports event tickets and U.S. Savings Bonds. Keller reported that a Houston high school gave a used Ford to a randomly selected student who passed Texas

exams. Students who passed all three segments of the Florida tests had a one-day paid trip to Universal Studios.

Florida requires standardized tests (FCAT) to be given throughout the school system. Teachers from the first day of the school year to the last are involved in finding a variety of ways of teaching for the test, preparing for the exam, giving it and waiting for the results. Schools are rated and teachers rewarded based on test scores. Due to educator protests, continuing efforts are made to fine tune the whole testing process to ensure that teachers in schools with at-risk students also have rewards. Massachusetts educators are debating what to do with student absentees who fail to take state mandated exams. Some suggest not including no-shows in final test score results while others believe all no-shows should be figured in the results to force educators to hold students accountable for failing to show up for test days. Absenteeism in middle and high school is a major challenge to educators whose salary increases depend in large part on test score results.

Research

Manzo (2001) reported on a *Rand Corporation* reading study which concluded that emphasis on boosting reading skills focus too much on basics rather than complex reading assignments. Manzo noted that effective teachers help students to summarize reading passages, identify themes, jot down notes and discuss the passages with classmates. Standardized assessment measures often revert to basics rather than dealing with understanding resulting in unintentionally dumbing down tests.

Zehr (2001) reported on a study "Dismantling Bilingual Education, Implementing Bilingual Education: The California Initiative," by Christine H. Rossell, a Boston University Professor and Language Acquisition Researcher which found English immersion is more effective than bilingual education. The study has been criticized by Bilingual Education advocates. Christine was hissed and booed by attendees at her American Education Research Association presentation on her comprehensive study of the progress of English-Learners in California since proposition 227. Zehr noted that bilingual education laws need to be made clearer with continuing research to examine results of bilingual and total English immersion education.

Hi Stakes Testing and the Law

Against. A lawsuit brought by 13 New Orleans parents to bar state and school districts from denying promotion to students who fail hi-stakes tests under the Louisiana Educational Assessment Program for the 21st Century was denied a hearing by the U.S. Supreme Court, according to Walsh (2002). Parents in *Parents Against Testing Before Teaching v. Orleans Parish School Board* (2001) were protesting promotion denial for 18,000 Louisiana students based on test performance. A U.S. Court of Appeals (2001) earlier had upheld a lower court's dismissal of a lawsuit that involved property interest in receiving a high school diploma.

For: In *Public Agenda: Reality Check 2002*, a study under a grant by the *Pew Charitable Trust* and the *GE Fund* revealed few students were unsettled by efforts to raise standard by testing, and teachers, parents and students supported maintaining student assessments. The study further found that for the fifth year in a row employers were disappointed with the skills of graduating high school students. Seventy-two percent of employers and fifty-eight percent of professors give students low marks on being motivated and conscientious.

Conclusion. The Hi Stakes Testing movement involves reductionism, mechanism, and reversion to basics in measuring student achievement levels. Well intended attempts to assess student achievement have often led to overemphasis on minutiae or basics rather than understanding larger issues and more complex questions. Trying to find a uniform assessment to measure student achievement, to hold teachers and administrators accountable for effective learning, is difficult in a democracy with many voices demanding to be heard. Opinions vary as to the need for standardized assessment tests. Low income, at risk, minority students and their parents seek alternative forms of measurement. Teachers with under-motivated, low achieving students find it difficult, due to the nature of their schools demographics. to have their merit increases based on grading schools' achievement levels.

Perhaps we should rethink the historical one ladder system of education and explore Europe's two-ladder system. Under this system there would be an opportunity for students to choose a vocational education track with the provision that they might enter the college bound track at a latter date. This would provide opportunities for

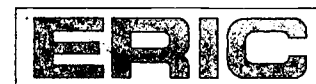
gainful employment at an early age as well as motivate youngsters not ready for a college bound-route.

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